



TITLE:

# Moro Piracy during the Spanish Period and Its Impact(<Special Issue>Forests and the Sea in the Southeast Asian Maritime World)

AUTHOR(S):

Non, Domingo M.

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CITATION:

Non, Domingo M.. Moro Piracy during the Spanish Period and Its Impact(<Special Issue>Forests and the Sea in the Southeast Asian Maritime World). 東南アジア研究 1993, 30(4): 401-419

ISSUE DATE:

1993-03

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/56477>

RIGHT:

## **Moro Piracy during the Spanish Period and Its Impact**

Domingo M. NON\*

Moro piracy during the Spanish period in the Philippines caused an epoch of wholesale misery for the inhabitants. A Spanish writer described the period as a chapter of Philippine history "written in blood and tears and nourished in pain and suffering" [Fernandez 1979: 203]. Piracy also hampered the social and material growth of the country. But its most devastating effect was the socio-psychological impact of the turmoil in shaping the relationship of the Moro and Christianized inhabitants.

Thus, this essay will attempt to re-examine the history of Moro piracy to determine its motives and the extent of its impact on the present society.

### **Geographic and Demographic Setting**

The Philippines is an archipelago consisting of more than 7,000 islands and islets with a total land area of more or less 114,830 square miles, stretching almost a thousand miles from north to south [Agoncillo and Guerrero 1982: 1]. The country has a rugged and irregular coastline with a total length of 10,850 statute miles, about twice as long as that of the United States of America. Luzon is the biggest island, followed by Mindanao and some island in the Visayas [Philippine Agricultural Staff 1975: 1].

Such irregularity results in the contours which are suitable for numerous fine harbors and land locked straits. All big and small islands have natural harbors that can accommodate large ships. In stormy weather these harbors, located strategically from north to south, provided refuge to ships [Agoncillo and Guerrero 1982: 7].

During the pre-Spanish period, native villages mainly comprised of scattered farms, while only a few were clustered, notably in the Kingdoms of Sulayman in Manila and of Humabon in Cebu. However, with the coming of the Spaniards, the colonial government for administrative convenience organized a new community structure for the inhabitants. This was supervised by the friars. In the new set-up, the scattered houses were clustered in towns called "pueblos." At the center of every town was a church, a town plaza and the government building called "tribunal" [Zaide 1961: 29].

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\* Social Science Department, College of Arts and Sciences, Mindanao State University, General Santos City 9500, Philippines (Visiting Research Scholar, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, from April 1992 to March 1993)

### The Motives of the Piratical Raids

Many writers on Moro raids or Moro piracy in the Philippines during the Spanish period attributed the Moro incursions in the Christian communities to plainly religious motivation. This line of thinking was easily accepted because the parties involved on one side were Muslims and on the other, Christians. However, to accept this line of reasoning is like concluding that Abdul and Juan fought each other because the former a Muslim and the latter a Christian, without getting into the real reason why. It is worth noting that during the Spaniards' first fifty years in the Philippines, their relations with the Moros were cordial [Scott 1982: 46]. What turned this cordial relationship into enmity is worth examining to understand fully the motives of the massive piratical raids conducted by the Moros against the Christian communities.

Meanwhile, to fully understand the change in the Moro-Spanish relations and the motivation of the former in their intensified raids against the Christian communities in the Visayas, Luzon and some parts of Northern Mindanao is to know the socio-political and economic structure of the society existing at the time of the Spanish arrival in 1521. It was noted that Islam had already acquired a firm hold among the rulers in Sulu and Magindanao who began to wield political influence in the neighboring islands. Moreover, with the Borneans, these rulers dominated the trade in the area. According to Scott:

Chinese goods were brought to Manila in seagoing junks and carried into the archipelago in shallow-draft Moro outriggers and Moro outposts on the north coast of Mindoro guaranteed this monopoly on domestic distribution. Then an east-west trade route carried Indian wares from Portuguese Malacca along the coast of Borneo direct to the international entreports of Butuan and Cebu, while a Moluccan branch of the same route crossed the Sulu archipelago, passed through the Basilan Strait and veered south of Sarangani. [*ibid.*: 47]

At this juncture of political and economic development in the archipelago, the Spaniards arrived and later established permanent settlements in strategic places which directly competed with the Moros and Borneans in the area. Hence, naturally, the latter reacted strongly as they had been used to exerting political and economic influence on the inhabitants. As Majul commented:

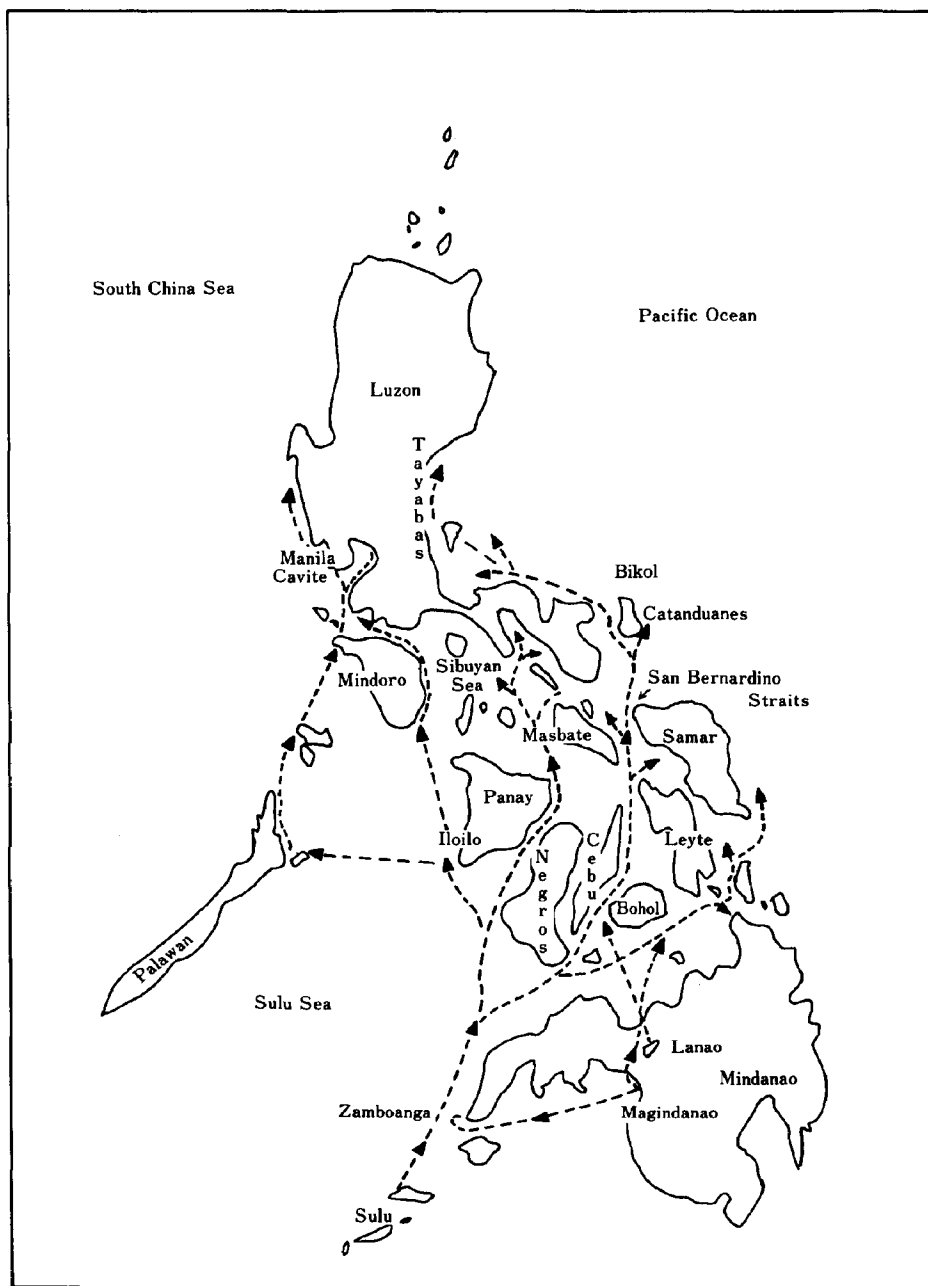
It is understandable why the people of Brunei would be unhappy about the coming of the Spaniards in the Philippines. For this was not only an intrusion into their commercial activities but a threat to their expanding political influence considering that the royal families of Manila and Sulu were related to that of Brunei. [Majul 1978: 81]

Consequently, the Moros and Borneans conducted raids on the Spanish-held settlements. However, these incursions reached a peak only in the decade of the 1750s. Accordingly, this phenomenon was spurred by the great market demand for slave labor for the Dutch East Indies. Sometimes the slaves were not sold for money but were exchanged for arms and ammunition. Obviously, these raids presented a source of power. Further, slaves had a considerable role in the socio-political and economic life of the Moros, who used them for housework, fieldwork, and craftwork. Thus, a French writer commented that "without slavery, the Moros cannot live for it was the base of their wealth and happiness." Moreover, their possession of slaves brought them power and influence [Loyre 1985-86: 26].

In fact, in the Tausog society, slave-holding was the primary form of investment and slaves were used as a unit of production and medium of exchange. In 1850, the estimated number of slaves or their descendants in Sulu constituted fifty percent of the population. Thus, we can see clearly the extent of the role of slaves in their economic undertakings. Further, Warren stated that "the intensity of Balinguingui raiding by 1830 was closely tied to the Sulu economy" [Warren 1981: 181, 201] and part of their social system [Warren 1971: 41]. Obviously, the foregoing served as the unifying force for wholesale slavery. Actually, slavery was already part of the socio-political and economic structure in the Philippine archipelago even before the coming of the Spaniards [Zaide 1957: 41]. Moreover, these practices were considered dubious under Islamic law. However, these were the most common activities of the Moros or Muslim Filipinos. Hence, we can safely assume that piratical raids and slavery were merely a continuation of the pre-Spanish traditions of plundering neighboring kingdoms for economic gain and to reduce their political threat [Loyre 1991: 66-67]. In fact, successful raiders were regarded as popular heroes and held in high esteem. These practices though were abandoned by the Christianized Filipinos because of their fear of the Spaniards [Scott 1991: 49-51].

Nevertheless, the scale and intensity of slave raids increased during the Spanish period, when the rewards of the slave market became more enticing with the demand for slaves in the Dutch East Indies. It should also be noted that the earlier scattered settlements of the natives were grouped by the Spaniards into a "presidio" near the Church for easy administration. This made the entire community an easy target for slavery by the capturing raiders. Further, the relatively weak resistance shown by the inhabitants was due to the Spanish policy of prohibiting them from carrying any form of arms, which they might have used for self protection against the raiders. Actually, the prohibition was intended to control bandits, who had become daring and destructive. This policy, however, least affected the lawless elements, and thus the general populace was rendered helpless before the Moro raiders [Dery undated: 9]. As such, we can safely assume that the motives of the Moro piratical raids on the Christian communities were primarily economic in nature as well as for the survival of their socio-political and economic structure. Moreover, piracy at that time was a world wide phenomenon.

As to the religious angle claimed by most writers, that the raids were reaction to the zealous propagation of the Christian faith by the missionaries, this is not very convincing. If this had been the case, why did the Moros conduct inland raids against the tribal or non-Christian communities in Mindanao [Loyre 1991: 18; Scott 1991: 146; Suazo 1980: 1-68; Saleeby and Gayangos 1976: 129, 138; Espinosa 1974: 25; Schlegel 1979: 18]? The Lanun (Iranun) and Balinguingui tribes also conducted raids among the inhabitants of Borneo and Malaya [Warren 1981: 239], including Badjaos [Warren 1971: 49]. Because

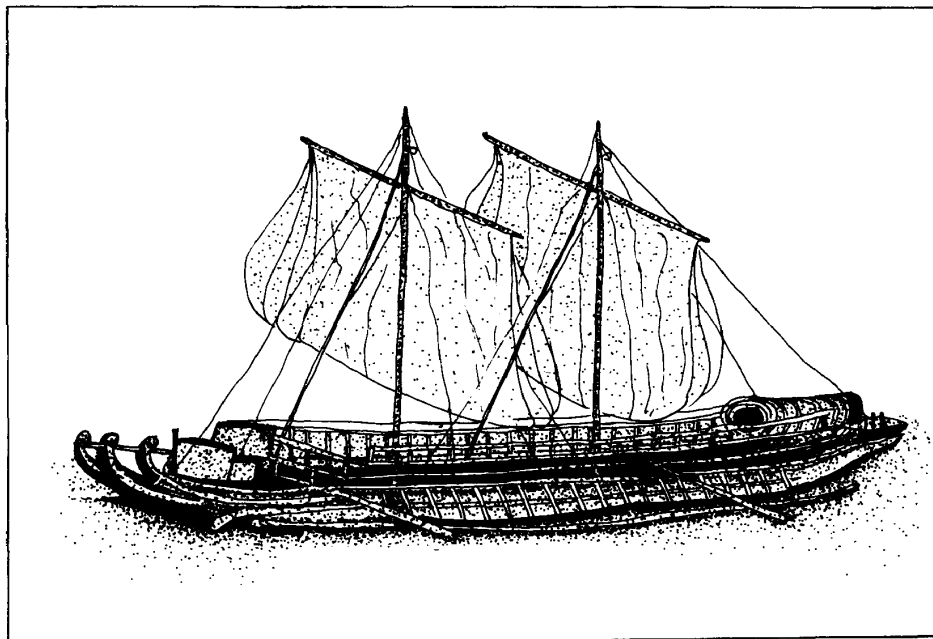


Map 1 Routes of the Piratical Raids

of the extent of these incursions, according to Dr. Hood Salleh of the National University of Malaysia, the people in Borneo on the north and west coasts of Malaya used the word "Lanun" in referring to pirates. Most of these people themselves were Muslims. Hence, if the motive of the piratical attacks was simple vengeance against the Christian missionaries in propagating their faith among the inhabitants of the archipelago, why were attacks on other Muslim communities, notably the Badjaos (one of the 13 ethno-linguistic groups belonging to the Moros), and the captured people brought to slavery? Even after the Spanish rule, the Tausugs continued to practice piracy, but by that time it was committed against the Badjaos, Yakans and fellow Tausogs [Kiefer 1969: 180].

### **The Patterns of Piratical Raids and Their Social and Economic Costs**

The Moro piratical raids against the Christian settlements started in June 1578 [Reed 1967: 94]. These spread all over the archipelago and were conducted with impunity by organized fleets carrying weapons of destruction almost equal to those of the Spaniards [Foreman 1980: 132]. For over two and half centuries the pirates spared not one inhabited island in the archipelago of nightmare. Piratical expeditions were conducted by various Moro groups, namely: Magindanao, Malanao (Maranao), Lanun (Iranun), Sangil (Mindanao Island group), Tausog, Samal, Badjao and Balinguingui (Sulu archipelago group). There were also foreign participants in this enterprise. They were the Ternateans, Borneans and Camacones. The Christians captured in earlier raids were



**Fig. 1** Moro Pirates' Ship  
Source: Adapted from Warren [1981].

made slaves and used extensively in the incursions as oarsmen of the pirates' vessels, freeing the pirates' hands from odd jobs especially during naval encounters [Majul 1978: 122].

The term "Moros" is a Spanish word derived from the Latin "Mauros," the name given to inhabitants of the ancient Roman province of Mauritania in the northwest Africa, who were Muslims. Thus, "Moro" was used by the Spaniards for anyone who was Muslim [Rasul 1970: 3]. Because of the piratical raids of the Moros in the Christian communities, the word "Moros" became synonymous with pirates and raiders.

In conducting their raids, the pirates adopted several methods of attack as dictated by circumstances. The earlier method was the surprise attack in force. The townspeople would be caught unaware and hence be unable to mount or organize resistance. Later, as the townspeople constructed fortresses and stone churches in which to take refuge during the attacks, the pirates laid a siege to their defences. Finally, when the defenders were weakened by hunger and fatigue, the pirates would storm them. Later, however, as frontal attacks became less effective, the pattern of Moro incursions changed from large-scale frontal attack to smaller, scattered raids against fishermen, traders and smaller settlements [Cruikshank 1985: 90] and the pirates, especially in small groups, resorted to sneak attacks on unsuspecting victims. With this method, the pirates usually hid in mangroves and coves and posed as fishermen. Each group was composed of from two to six outrigger Moro boats, while a bigger ship lay in hiding or was anchored in the pirates' base, which was usually located at the backdoor of a Christian town and serve as a rendezvous point for them in attacking nearby inlands or coastal towns. Among the islands used by pirates as bases were Mindoro, Burias, Samar, Leyte, Biliran, Masbate, Polilio and Paragua.

The following were some of the more devastating incursions and the responses to them of the colonial government and inhabitants, which imposed great social and economic costs on the community in general.

In the Visayan region, sometime in 1589, pirates raided Antique and captured many of the inhabitants for slavery. The raid was repeated the following year and the inhabitants suffered the same fate. For fear of further attack, the townspeople abandoned the town and fled to the mountains [Zuniga 1973: 460].

In 1599, Moro pirates from the Magindanao group, numbering 3,000 men in 50 boats, plundered with impunity the coastal towns of Panay and other Visayan islands like Negros and Cebu [Zaide 1957: 309]. Between 1750 and 1757, the number of persons paying tribute to the Spaniards in the town of Kalibo on the island of Panay decreased from 1,174 to 549.

The island of Leyte was subjected to several incursions in 1754 especially during the months of March, June and July. Its two largest towns of Sogod and Maasim were totally burned to the ground. The smaller villages of Hinundayan, Cabalcan and Liloan were likewise reduced to ashes. In Palompon though the inhabitants sought refuge in the stone church during the attack, they were left destitute afterwards. Their houses were looted and burned and their fishing boats and farm implements were lost. Hence, they could

neither farm nor fish.

In one of the raids in Romblon, 101 of the inhabitants of Odiongan were captured. After the raid, the population dropped from 230 to 70. In Bantan, 67 inhabitants were also taken in slavery. In July 1754, Dumaguete and Siquijor were attacked. The districts of Balamban and Batayan were raided and many of the inhabitants were taken captives for slavery. The Calamianes group of islands was also not spared. Between June and August 1754, Linapacan and Basuanga were reportedly attacked repeatedly. In these incursions, many of the inhabitants were also taken into slavery. However, the most unfortunate island was Biliran, where the entire populace was taken into slavery.

In Mindoro, the population was also greatly reduced. In 1735, the island had only a population of 2,634 heads of families down from 3,169 a year earlier. At Dumali, the eastern point of Mindoro, the entire coast was totally depopulated including the coves of Pinamalayan and nearby places. The Calavite point in the town of Ililim was also deserted. These places were used by the pirates as hide-outs [Zuniga 1973: 108-110]. Sometime in 1750s, the pirates also anchored in the Piloto river near Bongabon and captured 150 townspeople. Of these captives, 50 were from Bulalacao and Manaol [Bernad 1968: 127-129]. As such, the inhabitants of nearby towns shied away from these places for fear of being captured.

In view of the grave depopulation in this island, D. Rafael Maria de Aguilar, the Governor-General of the Philippines (1793-1806), encouraged the establishment of settlements in Mindoro by exempting the settlers from paying the required tribute for several years until such time when the regular towns were established. A magistrate was sent to Calapan, a relatively safe place in Mindoro, to promote the program.

In Luzon, Bataan also suffered depopulation due to piratical incursions, especially in the towns of Bagac, Cabcaban and Morong [Zuniga 1973: 119, 357]. Bicol region was also heavily attacked by pirates. In 1636, the town of Iguey in Sorsogon was raided and totally burned. Its residents were either killed or taken captive for slavery. Consequently, the town ceased to exist. In June of the same year, while most of the citizens were out in the fields, the pirates entered the town of Baco [Gerona 1982: 106]. Caught off guard by the raid, 200 of the townspeople were apprehended [Bernad 1968: 55]. The rest of them were either killed or escaped to the forests. A village in Balusan was attacked five times in 1746. The town and the church were burned and the villagers were carried away to slavery. In July 1754, while the townspeople of Matnog were tending their fields, the pirates raided and burned their houses. Many of the citizens were left dead by the wayside. In the years 1737, 1740, 1749 and 1781 many of piratical attacks were recorded in the coastal towns of Sorsogon which resulted in the burning of several towns, massacres, and the capture of many for slavery [Realubit 1983: 21].

In Albay, the port of Pantao, an important shipyard in Bicol was attacked on 18 October 1616 [Gerona 1982: 105]. In 1754, more towns were despoiled by the pirates. In these pillages, 38 were captured from Bao, 12 from the town of Albay and 67 from other



towns [Bernad 1968: 132]. In 1628 another shipyard in Camarines, Bicol was also destroyed by the marauders [Gerona 1982: 106]. In 1758, the Bishop Manuel Matos wrote to the King of Spain that 12 towns in Camarines had been invaded and about 8,000 inhabitants killed [Realubit 1983]. The report of the Father Provincial of the Franciscans in 1770 indicated that Bicol towns were very poor because the inhabitants could not trade externally due to Moro dominance in the seas. As of late 1826, the entire western coast of the region of Bicol was deserted [Dery undated: 10].

In June 1754, Balayan and Batangas towns were assaulted. In both cases, the townspeople fled to the forests for safety while their homes were reduced to ashes. In the same year, the town of Catanawan in Tayabas province was also razed to the ground [Bernad 1968]. Meanwhile, various reports from 1818 to 1860 indicated that the last heavy Moro raids occurred and reached as far as the Ilocos region [Dery undated: 8].

In Mindanao, from 1750 to 1757, almost all the towns in the districts of Butuan and Caraga and the islands of Siargao were marauded and burned down, making the entire area seem like a desert. Only the little military outpost of Linao was left unmolested, probably because it was too far inland and appeared unprofitable for a piratical raid. The raiders netted 300 captives from Butuan, 2,000 from Caraga, and 1,600 from Siargao, who were later either slain or sold as slaves. Only a few were able to flee to the forests to escape from the disaster [Bernad 1968: 127-128].

Another catastrophe was the invasion of Tandag in 1754. During the foray, the people sought refuge in the fort. However it was blockaded by the pirates. After four and a half months of siege, the defenders were weakened by starvation and fatigue and their resistance collapsed. The entire garrison was taken over by pirates and many civilians perished. The survivors suffered the same fate as those captured before them. A Recollect missionary tried to escape by hurling himself from a parapet to the shore below. All the town's valuables including the cannons were carted away by the raiders.

In 1750, the coastal villages of Layuan, Langaran and Palilan in the province of Misamis, located near the mouth of a river, suffered terribly at the hands of the marauders. In Langaran, 80 citizens were captured while Palilan and Layuan, the village chieftain and Gobernadorcillo, respectively, were killed.

On 9 July 1754, a well-organized raid was conducted by the pirates in Lubungan. They traveled by sea in 36 large boats and many smaller crafts. They were about 2,000 men composed of Moros from various tribes, namely, Malanaos, Magindanaos, Lutaos and Tausogs. There were also few renegade Christian and Chinese engineers who helped them execute a more efficient maneuver. The town was burned through the night and all the next day. In an effort to blockade the town, they laid siege to the defenders' stockade. They also constructed breastworks and dug up trenches to seal off the town. Twenty-eight moving towers with wooden wheels were made and ladders were prepared for the final assault. However, a pirate sentinel saw a reinforcement party on its way from Dapitan. Fearing a confrontation with a big contingent, the marauders abandoned their

siege and sailed away [*ibid.*: 134–139].

Simultaneously with the attack in Lubungan, another flotilla of pirates composed of 25 boats with 1,000 men landed in Palompon. Upon seeing their arrival, the townspeople panicked but managed to seek refuge in the church. In the confusion, the pirates set fire to the rectory and sacristy and ringed the church with trenches and breastworks. The church was subjected to heavy cannon fire and flaming darts. On the third day, the pirates stormed the church by using moving towers which were erected like Roman tortoises with guns mounted to shoot directly into the interior and create confusion among the people inside. Ladders were brought to the church windows so the pirates could forcibly enter, but the effort failed. On the fifth day, after several failures in wearing and tearing down defenses of the church, the pirates decided to give up the siege and sailed away.

Iligan was also raided by the Malanaos in the same year. The fort where the populace sought sanctuary was surrounded by the marauders, and intense fire was exchanged. However, after two months of hopeless siege, the pirates finally gave up. Initao, another small town between Iligan and Cagayan de oro, was also attacked. Since they lacked a stone fort, the townspeople defended themselves with a stockade. With the arrival of a relief party to the town's rescue, the pirates sailed away [*ibid.*: 128, 143].

During the Moro raids, the marauder harvested the crops abandoned by the inhabitants hiding inside their refuge. The latter suffered epidemics due to lack of food, water and proper sanitation within the sanctuary [Cruikshank 1985: 89].

Aside from the above pattern of raids, another pattern of incursion was adopted by the pirates. Loyre noted that the Malanaos conducted inland raids among their neighboring tribal communities [Loyre 1985–86: 18]. Moreover, the Magindanao also raided their tribal neighbors and pushed them farther into the interior. The victims were Tirurays [Schlegel 1979: 25] and B'laans [Espinosa 1974: 21]. Loyre commented that this kind of plunder was usually practised by the poorest datus, who organized piratical raids to accumulate wealth and establish power. These raids were conducted by only a few men, rather than the larger numbers of people and ships deployed in attacking coastal villages. The Malanaos generally conducted raids to the east of the Lake region in Sebugan [Loyre 1985–86: 20–21]. Their prey were probably the Manubos, Bagobos and Bukidnons.

During the period of piracy, staying in the coastal towns and villages entailed the great risk of being captured for slavery. Moreover, crossing the sea was equally dangerous since it was infested with pirates. Take the case of two Jesuit priests who were aboard a "caracoa" enroute to Mindoro. While not very far from the shore, they were attacked by the three "joangas" carrying Bornean and Camacone pirates. To escape, the "caracoa" sailed ashore and the priests escaped to the forest leaving everything behind. Hungry, fatigued and their feet covered with wounds they finally arrived Naujan after 20 days of wandering in the forest.

A worse experience was the one that befell the Archbishop of Manila, Hernando Guerrero, and his party. On their way to a pastoral visit in Mindoro, they were attacked

at sea by pirates in six galliots. Had their boat not been staunch and swift, they would have been captured or killed on the high seas. However, the pirates followed them ashore. Although the archbishop eluded captivity, most of his party did not. Only a few were captured for ransom while the rest were murdered [Bernad 1968: 54].

Sometime in 1859, a certain Maria Biermosa of Sebuyan, Capiz and three others, while on their way to the former's farm in Baybay, Leyte were captured at sea by pirates [De la Costa 1965: 204]. Even to go fishing in big rivers was dangerous, as pirates' boats frequently visited these places. Zuniga once witnessed from the mountain top several fishermen who were taken into captivity. These were the times when it was not safe to go to coast, since the Visayan seas were crawling with little fleets of Moro pirates. Thus desolation was everywhere as the plunder and burning of towns, seizing of vessels, capture of citizens and other atrocities by the pirates continued [Zuniga 1973: 107, 111]. From 1599 to 1604, the Moro pirates netted an average of 800 captives a year [Majul 1978: 213]. This period was not yet the peak of the piratical incursions. One can imagine the nightmare of the towns and villages that were being depopulated at the peak of the pirates' raids, and the traumatic impact on families whose members were captured by the pirates for slavery.

With these depredations, the Spanish civil, military and ecclesiastical authorities adopted measures to bring the piratical incursions in check and minimize the havoc wrought among the populace. Among the measures taken were the construction of fortresses and stone churches to serve as sanctuaries for the people from the pirates' assaults. Stockades were also erected to strengthen the defenses of towns. Watchtowers were built in strategic places to look out for pirates' ships and to forewarn townspeople, giving them ample time to organize an orderly defense of their community. Among the fortresses, the one in Zamboanga served as the headquarters and chief naval station of the Spaniards in the south. However, its maintenance was a great burden on the treasury. In 1738, the fixed annual expenses of the Zamboanga fort and its equipment were 17,500 pesos, while the incidental disbursements were estimated at 7,500 pesos. This sum did not include the cost of the armed fleet stationed at the fort, which also entailed enormous expenses. Moreover, the fort was described as a "sepulchre for the Spaniards" [Foreman 1980: 133]. Including other forts in various parts of the archipelago which Spain maintained to check piracy, the colonial government spent 50,000 pesos a year and about the same amount was appropriated for the construction of boats and expenses for expeditions. These expenses imposed a great economic burden on the colonial government [Zuniga 1973: 448-451].

On the other hand, the construction of forts, watchtowers and other structures for defense in various towns, in most cases, was left in the hands of the inhabitants alone through the leadership of their parish priests. Thus, the parish priests employed many means to erecting these structures. At times, the priest pleaded with the natives to donate lime and stone and supervised the building to completion. The problems in pushing the

projects through were innumerable. The priests had to use a combination of threat, gentle persuasion, punishment and many other tricks to motivate the natives to work without exasperating them [*ibid.*: 104–105].

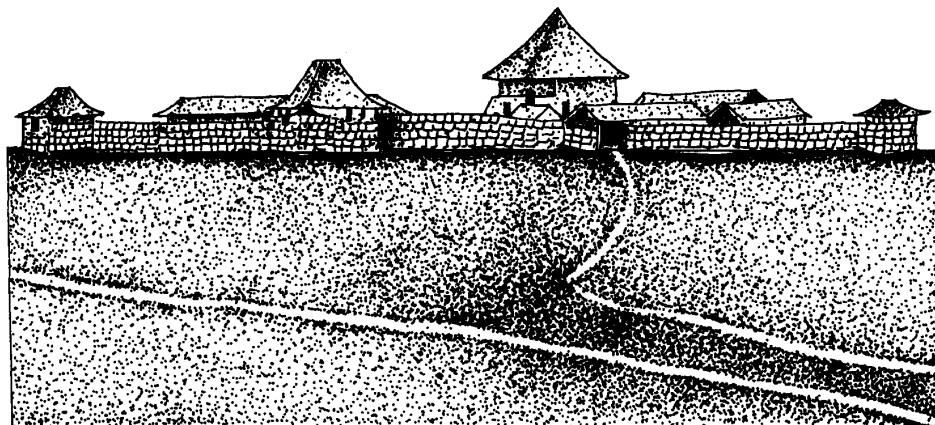
Simultaneous with the massive erection of these structures in various towns all over the archipelago was the construction of ships for use against the Moro pirates. Moreover, ships were necessary and paramount to the colonial economy of the archipelago, notably the galleon trade. The ships were built in areas where both timber and workers were available in abundance. The most prominent shipyard at that time was in Cavite. There were also shipyards in Arevalo (Panay), Bagatao (Albay), Marinduque, and Masbate. In connection with this, civilians were obliged to render work through the “polo system.” They were organized into work gangs and drafted to work in the shipyards and cut wood from the forests. The cutting of timber in the forests involved six to eight thousand men staying for three months in the mountains. This meant they had to leave their homes and farms for long periods of time [Schumacher 1979: 79]. In 1619, the Governor-General Alonzo Fajardo de Tenza reported that the native population was being reduced because of deaths suffered in gathering logs for the shipyards. Consequently, because of the polo system in the shipyard and in the cutting of logs from the forests for shipbuilding, the earlier prosperity enjoyed by the native populace ended [Cushner 1971: 117–119]. This was further compounded by the services the natives had to render in constructing defense structures for their towns.

In over two and a half centuries of Moro piracy, thousands of inhabitants were murdered while more were taken as captives for slavery. Villages and towns were burned and churches were looted of their ornaments and jewels. Local trade was greatly interrupted. Many of the inhabitants along the coast did not wish to risk their lives and escaped captivity by fleeing to the highlands. This utmost desolation and havoc were perpetuated and mitigated against the welfare and development of the citizens in the colony. As such, the period of piracy was an epoch of misery, bloodshed and material loss.

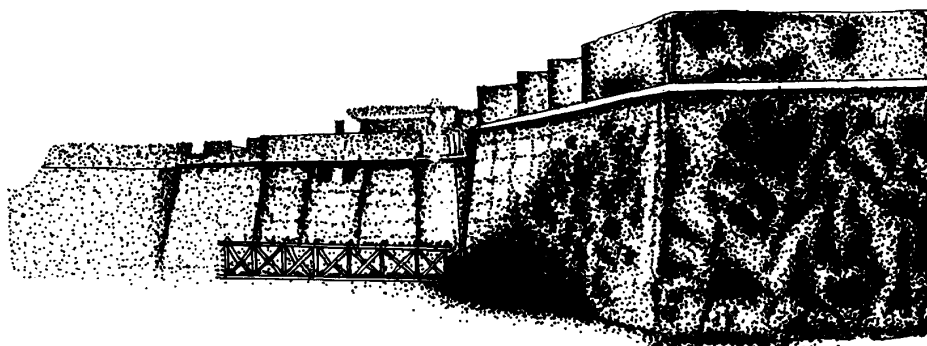
### **Measures to Check the Piratical Raids**

To neutralize the piratical incursions in the archipelago, the Spanish authorities initiated several measures to counter the depredations. Of the defense measures, one was the construction of fortresses in various towns, which were augmented by a network of watch-towers in strategic places along the coasts. Thus, the townspeople could be given warning of any approaching piratical raid. Moreover, the forts were supplemented by small fleets of armed galleys and frigates that patrolled the Visayan coasts. The major command posts were located in Manila, Cavite, Cebu, Iloilo [Reed 1967: 95], Zamboanga and Iligan [Bernad 1968: 43].

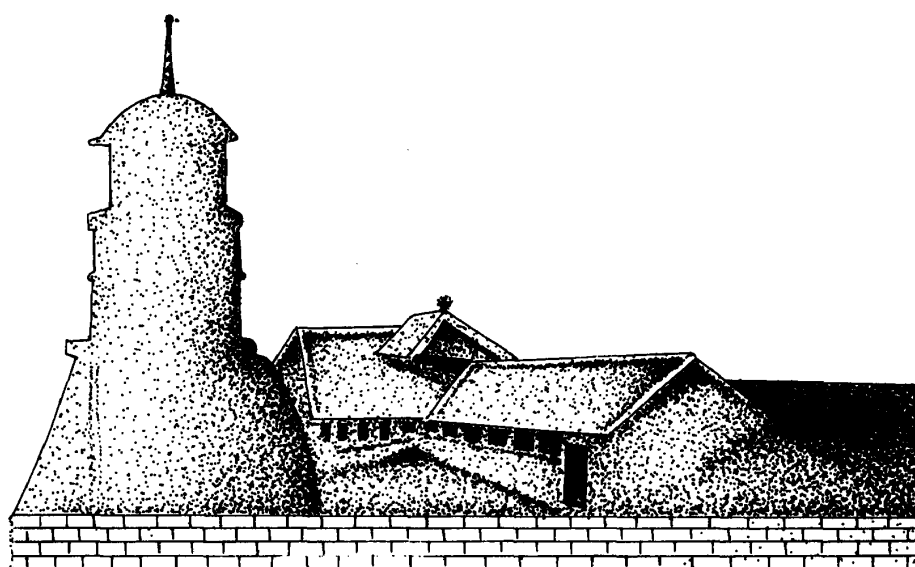
In the late sixteenth century, the Spanish colonial officials commenced the construction of coastal “presidios” in the Visayas [Reed 1967]. Meanwhile, other coastal towns



**Fig. 2** Spanish Fort of Iligan  
Source: Adapted from Saber [1980].



**Fig. 3** The Spanish Fort at Zamboanga  
Source: Adapted from Foreman [1980].



**Fig. 4** The Moro Watchtower, Church and Convent at Dumaguete, Negros  
Source: Adapted from Reed [1967].

and villages built forts for their own defenses after the Governor-General had given approval to the parish priests to build fortresses in their own towns by employing the native inhabitants at no expense to the colonial government. As the Spanish authorities in 1799 passed on to the native population the burden of conducting the wars against the Moro raiders, the earlier prohibition banning the natives from carrying arms was eased [Dery undated: 9]. Thus, the defenses were handled by the citizens through the supervision of the priests.

To intercept the piratical expeditions in the Visayan region, acting Governor-General D. Juan Cerezo was persuaded by the Jesuits to build the garrison fortress of Zamboanga in 1634. The fort plan was even prepared by a Jesuit priest, Father Vera. However, with the threat posed by the Chinese corsair Cogsén to Manila in 1662, Zamboanga was abandoned to allow its forces to strengthen the defense of Manila. Half a century later, recognizing the importance of the Zamboanga fort to check the piratical attacks in other islands, the King of Spain ordered its reconstruction, which was completed only in 1718 during the incumbency of Governor-General Fernando Bustamante [Zuniga 1973: 446-447]. During the protracted struggle with the Moro pirates, Zamboanga was further fortified and became the headquarters of the Spaniards in the south [Foreman 1980: 133].

Between the islands of Paragua and Panay, in the island of Cuyo, the natives constructed a stone fort complete with bulwarks and ammunition at no expense to the government. To the north of Paragua, a garrison was stationed in the town of Culion and a fort was constructed in Inapacan by the inhabitants under the guidance of the priest. On the other hand, the citizens of the island of Lutaya and smaller adjacent islands formed a town with the capital in Lutaya. In the construction of their fort they were provided with funds by General Rojas and arms and ammunition by the government, while the natives handled the defense without any compensation [Zuniga 1973: 461].

In Balayan, the townspeople constructed a fort with the church and convent inside and at the other end of the town a small castle on top of a small hill. It was used as a watchtower to monitor and give warning of the approach of pirates. This castle was provided with cannons. Batangas and Bauang also constructed their own forts to protect themselves from incursions. The Batangas fort was made of stone while that of Bauang was made of wood. Moreover, the churches of the towns were very close to the forts with its ramparts at all corners serving as defenses. Taal also constructed a fort. Later, Calapan and Sabang of Mindoro had fortresses too [*ibid.*: 102-103, 113].

In Samar, each town raised earthworks around its church and the residence of the parish priest where a few pieces of artillery were mounted. It was here where the citizens took refuge at times of attack and defended themselves with a few pieces of artillery, muskets and poisoned arrows [De la Costa 1965: 205]. In San Ignacio Strait, which almost merged Samar and Leyte, an Augustinian priest, Father Callazo erected a small fort in each of the five islets and provided them with artillery. Thus the pirates were prevented from passing through the strait to the eastern side of Samar and Leyte. This

left them no recourse but to take to the open sea at the southeast of Leyte and Mindanao, where they had not normally ventured before [Zuniga 1973: 435]. Aside from the above defense structures, the parish priests of several towns in Cebu continued to organize other systems of defense which were found to be effective not only to protect themselves but also their croplands, houses and other implements necessary for their economic undertakings.

One method involved the construction of ships known as "barangayanes," which were especially designed to give chase to the Moro "pancaos." These crafts proved faster than the pirates' ships. Thus, the moment the Moro pirates were sighted by the guards in the watchtowers, the Christian towns were given the alarm. Immediately, the natives on duty in several towns would launch their "barangayanes" and assemble at a pre-determined spot at sea to confront the marauders. Having better vessels, they were able to ward off the attacks and prevent the marauders from landing their shores. Under the direction of their respective parish priests, the towns assisted each other and worked together in mutual defense. Because of this, Moro pirates did not dare to show themselves, especially near the island of Cebu [De la Costa 1965].

In Mindanao, aside from Zamboanga, through the leadership of a Jesuit priest, Father Jose Ducos, a stone fort was constructed in Misamis to guard the entrance in Pangil Bay where the pirates used to pass in attacking the border towns and in marching inland. In the districts of Caraga, there were three fortresses manned and maintained by the colonial government. These were in Tandag, Catel and Linao. Other towns of the districts also had their own forts, but these were manned and defended by the natives [Zuniga 1973: 441-443].

Aside from the various defense measures adopted in checking the piratical incursions, the Spaniards dispatched several retaliatory expeditions against the pirates' strongholds to weaken their capability to launch raids.

In 1754, Governor Arandia Obando sent two fleets to Mindanao to try to stem the tide of Moro piracy. One fleet was sent to Zamboanga to deal with the pirates of the south. The other fleet was sent to Iligan to confront the pirates of northern Mindanao. This northern fleet left Manila in January, but was refitted and reinforced in Cebu. It arrived at Iligan in April and got into action only in June when its commander arrived. The commander's late arrival cost him his position, which was given instead to the Jesuit missionary Father Ducos. Governor Obando's successor had even conferred upon the priest the title of Capitan General of the Armada of Iligan.

The armada of Father Ducos had a complement of some 700 men, of whom 200 were Spaniards while the majority were natives, particularly Boholanons. There were also several boats manned by residents of Iligan and Initao. This naval squadron had the support of land forces which included several Bukidnon warriors under their respective chieftains.

In an effort to seal off the usual exits of the Moro pirates during their attacks, the fleet deployed in three places. Four Boholano boats were assigned to guard the mouth of

Liangan River, while the Galera San Philippe with smaller boats from Iligan patrolled the mouth of Linamon River near Iligan. The Galera Triunfo together with a few smaller vessels were stationed at Misamis to patrol Pangil Bay and were engaged in the greatest number of combats with the pirates. The report of their successful engagements reached Manila on 27 January 1755. After his success, Father Ducos found little difficulty in getting the civil and military authorities to listen to his suggestions for the defense of Mindanao [Bernad 1968: 43-44].

In 1722, Governor-General Anda decided to destroy the hide-outs of the pirates in Mindoro by sending four companies of Spanish troops and native soldiers to Mamburao. The pirates were encamped in a "cota" made of palisades mounted with cannon and stones lingers. Since the Spaniards were worn out upon arrival, they deferred their attack. Thus, under the cover of darkness the pirates had the opportunity to slip out of their "cota" and disperse in the forest where the soldiers could not flush them out. However, the Spaniards burned their lair including the houses and boats. After Mamburao, other places in Mindoro like Balite and other known hiding places of the pirates were also raided but always the pirates were able to escape into the forests. However, they no longer enjoyed the security they once felt in Mindoro [Zuniga 1973: 111-112].

The Spaniards were convinced that only by actual conquest of the Sulu archipelago and effective occupation of it could they effectively control piracy [De la Costa 1965: 212]. So in 1848, Governor Urbiztondo personally led an expedition to root out the Balinguingui pirates from their principal base. The fort of Sepac was taken by the soldiers after fierce resistance from the defenders. The assault was a scene of horror, with piles of corpses and dark flames devouring the houses of the Balinguingui. Many of them killed their own wives and daughters to save them from falling into the enemies' hands. Their losses were heavy. To prevent an epidemic, 340 bodies were burned [*ibid.*: 207-208].

Jolo was also massively attacked on 11 February 1851 which resulted in the capture of the town. The reigning Sultan Mohammed Pulalon fled to the interior with his principal datus.

At the close of the expedition, a treaty was signed between the Spaniards and the Sultan of Sulu which provided for annual payment of 1,500 pesos to the Sultan and 600 pesos each to three datus on condition that they would suppress piracy and promote mutual trade.

However, in 1876, since the incursions of pirates and the temerity of their chiefs had again attained large proportions, an expedition headed by Vice Admiral Malcampo was mounted with the objective of enforcing submission of the Sulu sultanate. Although the Sulu expedition was not a complete success, Spanish flags were hoisted in several places including Jolo until the end of the Spanish rule in 1898 [Foreman 1980: 140].

On 15 April 1887, Colonel Juan Ariola, the Spanish Governor of Sulu, acting on his own responsibility, ordered a steam gunboat to Maybun, the Sultan's capital, with orders to open fire at daybreak. That same night, Colonel Ariola together with his troops



marched across the country towards Maybun. The next morning, while the Moros and the gunboats were exchanging fire, Colonel Ariola attacked on the land side. The Moros, though surprised, fought like lions but were completely routed. The seat of the sultanate was totally razed to the ground. It was the most crushing defeat ever inflicted on Sulu, the center of piracy [*ibid.*: 144]. The Spaniards sent expeditions to Lake Lanao region as early as 1640. Bermudez de Castro with 500 Boholanos was sent by Governor-General Corcuera to subdue the Maranaos. Lacking logistical support, the troops were withdrawn and sent to Iligan.

The operation against the Lake Lanao inhabitants was only resumed in 1891 under the command of Governor-General Valeriano Weyler, who built a chain of fortifications from Iligan to the lake. The campaign against Marawi was not a total success. Thus in 1894 Governor-General Blanco concluded that effective control of the Lake Lanao region could only be secured with a fleet of light armed steamships. On 10 March 1895, with the steam gunboats, Governor-General Blanco's expedition succeeded in planting the Spanish flag upon the fort of Marawi. On 16 October 1895, the combined land and water forces under the command of Governor-General Blanco wrought havoc upon the Maranaos. Their "cotas" were destroyed while the movements of their boats were monitored. Thus, the Maranaos retreated to the hills [Saber 1980: 28-31]. However, the victory of the Americans over the Spaniards in 1898 caused the latter to abandon the region.

Despite the earlier defense measures, the Moro pirates continued to plague the Christian inhabitants with their hit-and-run raids. To check this depredation, a few enterprising and wealthy Spaniards and foreign merchants secured steamboats armed for defense to navigate the waters of the archipelago [Foreman 1980: 132]. Moreover, the colonial government purchased four steam-powered gunboats for use against the Moro pirates [De la Costa 1965: 200].

This kind of naval strength increased during the incumbency of Governor-General Norzagaray (1857-1860), who added 18 steam gunboats to the fleet. According to Dr. Tan, the introduction of the steam gunboats put an end to the earlier naval superiority of the pirates. Thus, with the naval superiority of the colonial government, the swift boats of the pirates which earlier dominated the seas in the archipelago were easily overtaken and warded off. Moreover, the pirates' villages became vulnerable to naval bombardment [Tan 1977: 11-12]. The diplomatic success of Spain in Europe also prevented the Sultan of Sulu from securing material assistance including arms from European countries like England to fight against the colonial government [De la Costa 1965: 211].

### The Impact of Piracy

Today, the ruins of watchtowers in strategic places, scattered along the coasts of Luzon, Visayas, and northern Mindanao, stand as silent reminders of the dreaded Moro piratical attacks made almost every year in the Christian communities for two and a half centuries.

Some of these ruins were the watchtowers in Narvacan, Ilocos Sur, Cebu, Dumaguete and Siquijor [Reed 1967: 90–110], the Bicol region [Realubit 1983: 21], the Iloilo coastline and bell tower in the same city [Fontecha 1989–90: 33–34], and in Mindanao. Aside from these watchtowers are the remnants of stone forts in various parts of the archipelago [Picornell 1977: 110–126] and of massive stone churches. A Jesuit writer pointed out that this kind of church was built to provide refuge for the native inhabitants during the piratical raids, and were strong enough to withstand battering and cannonading [Bernad 1968: 128].

As consequence of the devastating piratical raids, many of the coastal inhabitants who could not bear further incursions moved inland for safety. In the Province of Tayabas, its old capital was transferred inland as a precaution against another attack. And for the same reason, the towns Sariaya, Cavinte and Tiaong were also relocated inland [Zuniga 1973: 419]. Other inland settlements were also founded, and this paved the way for the development of the interior, which was once inhabited only by the Negritos and Remontados or Cimarones.

This also led to the establishment of Christian settlements in Mindanao, as the Boholanon troops used in the campaign against the northern Mindanao pirates were encouraged to settle near the Maranao pirates' lairs and check their piratical activities [Bernad 1968: 158].

This colonization program to establish Christian communities in Moroland was conceived by Governor-General Blanco to check piracy at the least expense to the government [Saleeby and Gayangos 1976: 164–165]. This program was also adopted by the succeeding colonial government as a measure to check the "Moro Problem" [Tan 1977: 27]. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth government, then the National government, made use of the resettlement program in Mindano not only as a solution to the Mindanao problem but also as a safety valve for the brewing social volcano in Luzon and Visayas brought on by the agrarian disputes. The solution proved effective, but became palliative and created a volatile atmosphere in Mindanao, as it heightened the mutual distrust between the Christian Filipinos and the Moros, which culminated in the so called "Muslim-Christian Conflict" in the 1970s.

At present, though the conflict has subsided, the mutual distrust between the groups still exists. The spate of reported bombing incidents in Zamboanga City, where grenades were thrown allegedly by Christians at Muslim gatherings and vice versa, seem to bear this out. These incidents are but the legacy of the piratical raids that continue to haunt both the Christian Filipinos and the Moros.

### Conclusion

Moro piracy during the Spanish period was a Moro reaction against the Spaniards, who had displaced them from the political and economic dominance they once enjoyed in the

region.

Furthermore, slavery was not the consequence of piratical raids. As noted, it was part of pre-Hispanic activities in the region. However, its immense proportion during the piratical attacks could be attributed to the lucrative demand for slave labor in the Dutch East Indies. Thus, it became the source of excessive wealth for the slave-traders. Also during this period, the Christianized Filipinos were vulnerable to the raiders since they had been disarmed by the Spaniards and hence could not ably defend themselves against the incursions. Thus, many were taken into slavery.

Since most of the marauders were Muslims and most of the victims were Christians, the unfortunate historical incidents only heightened the mutual distrust between the Christian and Muslim Filipinos' —a relationship that continues to hound them to the present day. Thus, piracy during the Spanish period shaped Muslim-Christian relations. As such, the war in Mindanao in the 1970s, which was dubbed as the "Muslim-Christian Conflict," was but the continuance of hostile relations between these groups.

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